

TRADITIONAL VENERATION OF ICONS IN THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Abstract: The veneration of icons in the Orthodox church is an integral part of the Russian liturgical tradition. It is possible to study icons only as a sacred work of art intended for prayer. Therefore this article's goal is to show the forms of veneration of icons in the temple as its major environment. In the tradition of Russian Orthodox piety icon worship is expressed in various forms. The major form of veneration of icons is expressed in believers standing in front of them in prayer. In the services of the Russian Orthodox Church it is customary to worship icons with prayer and Akathist services. One of the Holy Fathers said: "Do, do the external, for the external belongs to us, and the internal to God. And for the external the Lord shall give us also the internal" (PESTOV 2000: 542). Such external forms of the veneration of icons are expressed in bowing before them, kissing, censing, lighting candles and decorating holy images. All these signs of veneration precede the prayer and create a special mood.

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The veneration of icons in the Orthodox church is an integral part of the Russian liturgical tradition. It is possible to study icons only as a sacred work of art intended for prayer. Therefore this article's goal is to show the forms of veneration of icons in the temple as its major environment.

On the day of the Triumph of Orthodox Christianity – a holiday established in 843 in honour of the institution of the veneration of icons – a verse "We worship the most pure icons..." is heard during all readings. A saint martyr Stefan the Junior chanted this tropar to the faces of his torturers and iconoclasts as early as the end of the 8th century (*Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware* 1978: 302). Icons have remained an integral part of the liturgy from that tragic time right up to the present. In the tradition of Russian Orthodox piety icon worship is expressed in various forms. This article is devoted to some of them.

The major form of veneration of icons is expressed in believers standing in front of them in prayer. The purpose of icons is to facilitate a prayer, close perception of God and the Saints. The beneficial effect of an icon occurs during prayer when the mystic experience of perception of the other reality connects a person with the Protoplast. In St. John

Chrysostom's biography there is a description of such a lofty spiritual contemplation experience: "...the blessed John greatly loved the letters of the most wise Paul. ... He also had an image of this Apostle in an icon ... And when he read his letter he would look at the image with all his eyes, with such attention would he look at him as if the Apostle were alive; glorifying him and visualising him, he would direct toward him all his meditation and, through contemplation (of the image) would talk to him" (Prepodobnyj IOANN DAMASKIN 1993: 123). Alas, such heights of spiritual contemplation are characteristic of only a few spiritual giants. Therefore many Saint Fathers of the Church warned of the danger of temptation and spiritual pride. A prayer should be based on humility and repentance being its soul. "A sacrifice to God is a grieving spirit: a heart that is grieving and humble God shall not abase" (Ps. 50, 19).

Particularly powerful is a prayer before icons in a temple as a house and dwelling of God (see Mt. 18, 20; 21, 13). The Saviour points to the necessity of a public prayer; He Himself used to pray among people (see Jn. 11, 41–42), and among His disciples (see Jn. 17, 27, 27–30). He promised His spiritual presence during a public prayer (see Mt. 18, 20), so Saint Apostles and first Christians following their Lord's instruction often prayed together (see Acts 1, 14; 2, 1), being "in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2, 42). After the final victory over iconoclasts and the dogmatic establishment of icon worship at the 7th Ecumenical Council (787), churches were filled with icons. It became easier for believers to concentrate on a prayer when looking at icons which reflected a living human personality transformed by the Holy Spirit.

The Saviour speaks of public prayers being particularly pleasing (see Mt. 18, 19). A description by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem (7th century) of the miracles revealed by the saint martyrs Cyrus and John, concerning the healing of Subdeacon Theodor suffering from gout could be an example of such a prayer before icons from the life of the ancients. In a half dream he saw saint martyrs who ordered him to follow them. They entered a Greek temple with many icons inside. Right in the middle of the temple he saw a painted "great and amazing image" of God with the Virgin on the left and John the Baptist on the right as well as a host of apostles and prophets. St. Cyrus and St. John together with the suffering youth "as they stood before the icon they beseeched God bending their knees, and striking their heads on the ground, and begging for healing". But they were not given what they asked for at once. "And when they came to the icons for the third time they started to use previous means and words. And because they persistently for a long time asked and appealed for one thing prostrating themselves: Command, Thou, O Lord! then Christ being a compassionate Lord showed His mercy and said from the icon: you too show your mercy. The saints, as soon as they rose from the ground, started to thank Christ our Lord for answering their prayer" (Ibid.: 163–4).

Believers know it is in the temple, the protoplast of the Kingdom of God, that a human from the temporary world enters the eternal world, the Kingdom of the future century, where "there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10, 6). That is why the Orthodox Christians while praying become imbued with the idea of the other reality visually reflected in the icons. This silent call for salvation of every human soul can be considered as the first spiritual step to comprehension of the Divine Revelation.

In the services of the Russian Orthodox Church it is customary to worship icons with prayer and Akathist services, "when the whole body of the Church unanimously and with a single heart forwards petitions in the presence of priests offering up prayers of all people" (DJAČENKO 1894: 155). Every Orthodox Christian, who turns himself trustfully toward the Protoplast depicted in the icon, knows that many of his entreaties can be fulfilled thanks to an ardent prayer. "If ye have faith, and ... if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Mt. 21, 21). A specialist in the study of art, N. M. Tarabukin, while pondering on the significance of icons wrote that their purpose is not limited to mere reminding of the Divine Image, their goal is to work wonders. An icon is miracle-working due to the Divine Power that is manifested through it as well as to a believer's counter effort (TARABUKIN 1999: 83). When an icon is consecrated it is said: "And grant this icon the power of miracle-working effect." (Ibid.) Russian people in all periods of history believed in the protection given by miraculous icons. In 1812 at the departure of M. I. Kutuzov to the front-line forces during a prayer service devoted to the victory over Napoleon in the Kazan Temple of St. Petersburg a miracle-working icon of Our Lady of Kazan was laid upon him (*Prečistomu obrazu Tvoemu poklonimsja* 1994: 233). Later the glorious field marshal returned to the temple but that time for good, for there he found eternal peace.

A remarkable writer, Boris Zajcev, after visiting the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos in 1928, described an Akathist service to Our Lady in front of the icon painted on a special wimple where the Holy Virgin was depicted in the heavens holding a long and narrow omoforion as if She was shielding the sacred Mount Athos with her protection and mercy. Zajcev writes: "This is a day-time service. In the final, major part a hegumen and two hieromonks in white festive liturgical vestments standing in a semi-circle on the ambon opposite the Royal Doors read the Akathistos in turn. Over the Doors there is an image of the Most Pure Virgin, but a special one, painted on a thin golden 'wimple'. Its lower part is trimmed with delicately tatted lace. During the reading the image silently and slowly descends, which makes the light cloth of its omoforion stream. The voices of the readers become more feeling, a light trembling and radiant inspiration run over the church: the Holy Virgin 'with Her honest omoforion', having a semi-airy, light-golden aspect, Herself appears among Her faithful ones. The image stops at a human height level. The choir is singing, all those present one by one kiss the image, evening sunrays on the left lightly fall onto the lace and golden tints of the swaying icon. And in the same slow manner the image after accepting veneration ascends to its heavenly heights – it seems it could rest on nothing but clouds." (ZAJCEV 1998: 155)

In fact, in every Russian church where there is a venerated icon the Akathists are read on particular days to the Saints or, more often, to the Holy Virgin depicted in the image.

When the Hegumen of schima Savvas (Ostapenko) (1898–1980) served in Velikije Luki, he established a rule to bring the icon of Our Lady "Joy of all the Afflicted" to the centre of the temple on Sundays so that during the evening service the believers could chant the Akathist with their faces turned toward the beloved image. The starets said about reading of akathists: "Akathist is our delight at the majesty of God, His Most Pure Mother and all the Saints" (*S ljubov'ju o Gospode, vaš D. O. S.* 1998: 64). Also on his

initiative since 1954 in Pskovo-Pečerski monastery every day after evening service akathists have been read before venerated icons of the temple and local saints (Ibid.: 46).

Metropolitan Manuil (Lemeševskij) established the same rule when he served as a Bishop in the city of Serpukhov from 1928 to 1930. Vladyka introduced paraclises, i.e., prayer singing with akathist and the Canon of Our Lady, to everyday church life (*Svetitixij* 1998: 10–1). He would personally perform akathist services in the Nikolski Cathedral before the icons of Our Lady “Joy”, “Consolation”, “Inexhaustible Cup” as well as many other icons of the Holy Virgin in churches and chapels of the city. A special kind of veneration of the icon “Seeking of the Lost” introduced by the Vladyka consisted in carrying the icon with prayer singing from the winter to the summer temple after the ceremonial service in Nikolski Cathedral. Moreover, it was venerated with molebens and Akathist services in all city temples in turn. The final farewell service was related to the carrying of the icon from the summer temple to the winter one. The veneration lasted from 10 July (Julian calendar) to the first Sunday preceding the Dormition Fast. Throughout the whole period of the icon’s “visit” they decorated temples and tried to sing with utmost reverence in order to create a prayerful mood.

Nowadays, at the beginning of the 21st century, in many churches akathists are read before revered icons on certain days. Thus, in the settlement of Il’inskoe (Kazan railroad) in the Church of the Presentation in the Temple of the Most Holy Virgin every Thursday akathist is read before the icon “Inexhaustible Cup”. The image is famous for the fact that praying before it helps people to get rid of such diseases as heavy drinking, drug abuse and smoking. Many desperate people, as well as parents and relatives of those who suffer from the diseases come to the church and ardently pray to the Virgin before her miracle-working image. During the reading all those present kneel and at the end kiss the icon.

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The rite of genuflexion during prayer was set by the Lord Himself, Who in the Garden of Gethsemane “fell on the ground and prayed” (Mk 14, 35). That is why kneeling prayers have existed since the time of the early Christians. Reverend Cassian the Roman in 420 described the “way” and “order” of saying a prayer at communal monasteries of Egypt and Thebaida: “When at the hour of performing the order brethren come together, they do not immediately after singing the Psalms proceed to kneeling. First they keep standing for some time praying with their hands raised. Then, after sinking to the ground and praying on their knees for a short time, they stand up again all together...” (*Tainstvennyj mir molitvy* 2001: 67). Veneration of icons can also be found in written and iconographic sources of the early period of the history of Byzantium (6th–7th centuries). The ecclesiastical ritual adoration appeared as late as in the post-iconoclastic time. The dogmatic basis for it was the decrees of the 7th Ecumenical Council (787) stating that “the honour done to the icon refers to its Protoplast, and the one who worships the icon worships the hypostasis of what is depicted in it” (*Dejanija Vselenskix Soborov* 1891: 285). The Council particularly emphasised that we do not worship icons but venerate them,

because only God should be worshipped. A ceremony of proclamation and veneration of the holy icons that took place in Saint Sofia's Cathedral of Constantinople on 11 March 843 and symbolised the final victory over the Iconoclasts was adopted as a ritual model.¹

In Russia icons have been venerated since their very advent. Since for the Russian people Byzantium was the model in the sphere of religious life, all dogmatic foundations of the faith and rites were strictly obeyed.² According to an Orthodox tradition a Christian when entering a temple should bow before icons, but before each bow he should make a sign of the cross as a token of his belief in Christ and in the fact that intercession of the Saints depicted in the icons and a prayer of the believer himself are powerful before God. An icon is created for the sake of a prayer, that is why standing before a holy object has always been expressed in bows accompanied by prayers. When worshipping the icons of the Saviour an Orthodox Christian says the Lord's prayer to himself or: "I have sinned innumerable times, Oh, Lord, have mercy upon me"; before icons of the Saints he says: "Pray ye to God for us"; before images of Our Lady a believer knowing of the extraordinary power of Her intercession prayers before Her Son, invokes: "Oh, the Holiest Virgin, save us".³

Joseph of Volotsk while recalling a legend of the Archeiropoietos Image, wrote that after the death of Christ the Apostles ordered Luke the Evangelist "to paint His most pure image in the icon" so that they could worship Him. St. Joseph continued that Apostles, Fathers and teachers of the Church, "set a tradition of painting the holiest images of God, and the Saviour, and His Saints on the northern and western and on all walls of temples worshipping and venerating them" (Prepodobnyj IOSIF VOLOCKIJ 1994: 77–8). St. Joseph put worshipping veneration of icons in the first place and differentiated two kinds of worship: corporeal and mental, believing that true worship should include both levels. When physical vision is directed toward an icon and spiritual vision toward its Protoplast "then with all your heart, mind and sense raise the eyes of your mind in the purity of the heart" to the sacred object, and your "physical eyes raise to the most honest icon ... and worship them (icons – K. Ts.) mentally – in your soul, and physically – with your body" (Ibid.: 93–4).

¹ An anonymous Byzantine author of the 10th century describes a custom of ceremonial veneration of the icon of the Archeiropoietos Image of the Lord in Edessa that took place during the Week of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, when restoration of the veneration of icons (842) was celebrated. ("O svjatoj i nerukotvornoj ikone Iisusa Xrista Boga našego, kak čtilos' v gorode Edesse žiteljami ego." The text in: STERLIGOVA, I. A. O značenii dragocennogo ubora v počitanii svjatyx ikon. In: *Čudotvornaja ikona v Vizantii i DREVNEJ Rusi*. Moskva, 1996, pp. 127–128). The custom described and other processions with icons took shape in Russia as Processions with the Cross.

² Bowing as one of the forms of veneration of a sacred object is known from the Old Testament, where it is said that Joshua entering the Tabernacle "fell to the earth upon his face before the Arc of his Lord" (Jos. 7, 6). From the New Testament it is known that Our Lord Jesus Christ when praying to His Heavenly Father kneeled down and fell on his face (Lk. 22, 41; Mt. 26, 39). The Samaritan healed by Jesus "fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks" (Lk. 17, 16). Both Saint Apostles (Acts 9, 40; 20, 36; Eph. 3, 14) and Fathers of the Church (IOANN ZLATOUST, svyatiťel. Tvorenija. T.3. *Besedy o tom, čto ne dolžno razglašat' grexov bratij*. St. Petersburg, 1897. p. 373) used to kneel down.

³ On kinds of prayer and their significance in spiritual perfection of a Christian see in: SKURAT, K. E. *Xristianskoe učenie o molitve i ee značenie v dele npravstvennogo soveršenstvovanija*. Klin, 1999.

Among the ways to get closer to God, ancient sources mention first of all praying before icons as well as lying on the ground and kneeling (VENIAMIN arxiepiskop 1992: 64). In the description of confession in Nilo-Sorskaja pustyn (17th century) it is said that a monk “[f]irst makes a bow before holy icons with humility. Then pronounces a verse addressing the father and brethren. And he falls on his face in the middle, confessing his sins and is held by them and he asks for forgiveness and prayers of the father and his brethren” (ROMANENKO 2000: 107).

The tradition of “falling on one’s face” or prostrating oneself was mentioned by foreign diplomats and travellers in the 17th–18th centuries. Thus A. Olearius wrote that “Russians performed prayers in both kneeling and prostrated position and the Tsar Aleksej Mixailovič often prayed in the same manner” (OLEARIJ: 158). Simple and deep bows before icons were widespread in the tradition of Russian piety even if the Church Statutes did not prescribe them. Those who expressed special zeal were treated by simple people with great respect and love especially if they were noblemen or, of course, Tsars observing forms of piety accepted by a folk tradition.

Our contemporary – starec Zechariah (1850–1936) also used to speak about praying in a prostrated posture before icons. In the teachings to his spiritual children concerning melancholy (a sin that kills will, senses and mind) he advised to lie in a cross-like posture while praying as many ascetics in the ancient times used to do to combat passions (*Starec Zaxarija* 1998: 78). The starec recommended to say the following prayer while doing it: “Let God resurrect and His enemies dispel” or a canon to the Precious and Life-giving Cross wherein it is said: “The Purest Virgin Mother of God spreading Thy hands in a cross-like posture toward the One put onto the Cross, Oh, Lady, offer up Thy prayers for all who faithfully pray to Thee”. Father Zechariah had a wonderful gift of casting unclean spirits out of the possessed, but before it he prayed ardently, lying in a cross-like posture. A witness describing a divine service in the village of Rakitnoe of Belgorod province in the 1970s noticed that Archimandrite Seraphim (Tjapočkin) after entering the temple used to proceed to the central anoloi. At that moment it was customary to sing: “Seeing the resurrection of Christ...”. To that singing father Seraphim usually kissed all icons in a kneeling posture, then prostrated himself and the whole temple followed him (Ierodiakon SOFRONIJ 1998: 83).

Kneeling before icons is a token of gratitude for blessings and sufferings, a token of humility before the Lord, an external way to express one’s sinfulness. Such Russian Saints as Sergius of Radonež, Nilos of Stolbensk and Seraphim of Sarov passed away in a prayerful posture before icons.

Washing is one of the lost forms of veneration of icons. This custom was described by a Byzantine historian of the 9th century: “in the middle week of the holy fasts, on the fourth? day the Archpriest opened an icon case and washed an icon with a special “untouchable” wet sponge. Water squeezed from it was distributed among people and was considered healing, especially for eye diseases”. The tradition of washing venerated icons was continued in Russia. From “The Legend of Miracles Worked by the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir” the text of which took shape in 1163–1164, it is known that water used for washing miracle-working icons was sent to the suffering in the different corners of the country. It is possible that in the 12th century there was a special service order of washing

icons analogous to a later order mentioned in the Books of Needs. "To wash the Relics of the Saints, or wet the Cross, or drink water from the Cross according to the order." (NIKOL'SKIJ 1885: 257–76)

The text of *Domostroj* – a book written by a priest Sylvester, a contemporary of Svjatitel Nikolai, confirms the spread of this custom at least up to the 17th century. Sylvester wrote that in case of a disease or any other suffering "he should heal by the mercy of God", by tears, prayer and repentance. "And to encourage spiritual fathers to pray to God: to sing prayers, bless water from precious crosses and from holy relics and from miracle-working images" (*Domostroj* 1991: 41).

Sources dated from the middle of the 19th century at the latest point out that in Pskov region the washing of icons was remembered as a special rite established in the Tixvin monastery since time immemorial (*Opisanie čtimyx ikon* 1994: 37). The washing of the miracle-working image – the Tixvin Icon of the Mother of God – was performed on Thursday of the Holy Week. After finishing the liturgy the Archmandrite with the brethren served the moleben with the blessing of water before the Icon. After thrice-repeated submersion of the cross into water a keeper of the Icon in an epitachelion opened a golden vestment of the image, while a Father Superior having bowed three times washed the Icon with holy water and then applied kerchiefs (previously sprinkled with holy water) brought by believers to the sacred object to wipe it and blessed the kerchiefs. The Father Superior, brethren and then believers kissed the miracle-working Icon and the blessed water was distributed among those present. Though at the time of the Second World War the Icon was taken away to America, many monasteries and parish churches of Russia keep renowned copies of that miracle-working image.

The kissing of holy icons is also of Byzantine origin. Maximus the Confessor wrote that on special occasions they used to kiss icons of Christ and the Holy Virgin (EVSEEVA 1994: 68). Ancient sources contain few references to this tradition. Holy fathers in the 7th century after taking an important decision would kiss sacred objects and in confirmation that the decision was right were thus granted blessing: "... and after that all stood up and falling down with tears repented and offered up prayers, and each one of them kissed the Holy Gospels and the Precious Cross and the image of Our Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin that gave birth to Him, having put their hands (on all these) to confirm their words" (Prepodobnyj IOANN DAMASKIN 1993: 163).

In Russia the tradition has been strengthened and developed. When entering a temple each believer kisses an icon of the holiday and then kisses the most revered images as well as those before which he will pray. For many centuries in Russian religious tradition, veneration of icons in the form of kissing has not gone through any changes. Established rules are still valid. Thus the Patriarchal Service Book dating from the middle of the 17th century explains that when kissing the icons of the Saviour one should kiss a foot (in case of a half-length image – a hand); the icons of the Virgin and Saints – a hand; the icons of the Archeiropoietos Image of the Saviour and the Beheading of St. John the Baptist – a hair plait (*Čto dolžen znat'* 1995: 42).

The rite of kissing the icons at the entrance to the altar refers to the early forms of involvement of images into everyday divine service.⁴ The most frequently celebrated Liturgy of John Chrysostom includes prayers, after saying which a priest and a deacon kiss the icons of Christ and the Holy Virgin by the Royal Doors. At the time of the Little Entrance a priest kisses a lesser icon of the Saviour at the side of the Royal Doors. Explaining this kissing Simeon of Thessalonica wrote: "When an Archpriest kisses the Doors it means that Christ opened us the entrance to the Holy through the veil of His flesh" (VENIAMIN arxiepiskop 1992: 170). Then the priest turns his face to the west, blesses a candle bearer, kisses a similar icon of the Holy Virgin near the Royal Doors and after entering the altar kisses the altar table. After that the deacon asks the priest for a blessing for the time of the Thrice-Holy, stands at the Royal Doors facing the believers and pointing with the orarion to the icon of the Saviour, and turning to the icon of the Holy Virgin and the altar table finishes the priest's exclamation: "...and unto ages of ages".

A custom of kissing on the night of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ remained only in the Orthodox tradition. "Christ resurrected!" – they say on Easter. "Verily resurrected!" – it is heard in reply and by mutual thrice repeated kissing the believers not only express Pascal joy but also pay tribute to the image of God mystically reflected in each person. In the mystery of the Holy Night, when the redemptive sacrifice of the Saviour wins the transcendental victory, the Creator and the creation come mystically together and all mankind that glorify the resurrected God finds truly collegial existence becoming for a moment a living icon of the deified world. The kissing of icons and Pascal greeting at the time of the Pascal service among clergy have always been performed in a particularly solemn manner. G. Georgievskij recorded that in the 17th century on Easter during Pascal greetings in the altar of the Uspenskij Cathedral (Cathedral of the Dormition) in Moscow key-keepers offered the Gospel to one Metropolitan, the image of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to another, and various icons to co-serving priesthood. When all in the altar stood in a row – Pascal greeting started. The Patriarch kissed the Gospel and icons held by priests and, greeting the latter with the words: "Christ resurrected!" kissed them. After that Pascal greeting took place in the middle of the temple (GEORGIEVSKII: 124–7).

One more form of veneration of icons is incense censuring by a priest during a divine service, a procession with the Cross, and prayer services at home before icons. When a priest and choir-members sing holiday songs paying tribute to the Protoplast depicted in the icon, censers and incense put to them symbolise "gifts brought by wise men from the East: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (VENIAMIN arxiepiskop 1992: 10).

As a Church legend narrates, when the first human beings, Adam and Eve, lived in the Garden of Eden they walked in the garden and glorified God and the beauty created by Him. According to the Orthodox Christian concept a temple is the Garden of Eden and

⁴ In the "Book of Ceremonies" by Constantine (10th century) and later in liturgical Order of Service known from a manuscript of the 12th century it is said that the emperor as well as the archpriest before entering the altar of St. Sofia of Constantinople kissed "a holy icon" in the Royal Doors to the left. – (See: LIDOV, A. M. *Vizantiyski antependium. O simvolicheskom prototipe vysokogo ikonostasa*. In: *Ikonostas. Proisxoždenie. Razvitie. Simvolika*. Moskva, 2000. p. 166).

when at the time of the divine service they open the Royal Doors, it is as if the altar and the whole temple turn into Paradise. A priest symbolises Adam and a deacon, holding a candle, Eve. When going round the church they glorify the Almighty by censuring, while the choir sings: "Marvellous are Thy deeds, Thou created everything by wisdom..." (Ibid.: 79). On the side doors of the iconostasis through which they go out for censuring, Saint Deacons Stefan and Laurentius are most frequently depicted. The image of a deacon symbolises standing before angels during a divine service.⁵ Censers in the hands of deacons have a special significance for they remind us both of services in the Tabernacle of the Old Testament and of offering up incense at the wall of Heavenly Jerusalem.⁶ A censer was used for burning incense on the golden altar before the Holy of Holies (see Ex. 40, 26–27). The church of the New Testament inherited this sacred rite in the meaning of sacrifice because a priest at each censuring says a prayer: "A censer we bring to Thee, Oh, Jesus with a spiritual fragrance, take it in Thy Heavenly Credence..." (MURETOV 1895: 258). I. A. Šalina writes that the Old Testament priests – Zechariah, Aaron, Abel and Melchizedek – with censers in their hands were also depicted on side doors of iconostases of the 16th–17th centuries. There were such paired figures on the doors of the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Tver, and in Novgorod temples: the Church of John the Baptist on Opoki, and the side-altar of St. Anthony's monastery (ŠALINA 2000: 570, and footnote 66). The Old Testament priests stood for Christian priests, and the censer of the Tabernacle for the altar censer. "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" (Rev. 8, 3–4).

It is known that once a year the Old Testament High Priest entered the Holy of Holies where he used a golden censer for a purifying sacrifice. That action is remembered in the Censer prayer read by a priest during censuring of the northern part of the altar: "Oh God Who accepted Abel's gifts, Noah's and Abraham's and Zechariah's sacrifice, accept as well incense from the hands of us, sinful ... for the sake of abandonment of sins" (MURETOV 1895: 259).

In churches not only icons are censured but all Christians to show reverence for God for He manifests Himself in His images: icons and people. At the most solemn moments of the divine service the rite of censuring symbolises thanksgiving and offering a prayer. L. A. Uspenskij wrote that "icons serve as mediators between the depicted and the praying owing to blessed communion, for the state of grace acquired by a Saint *inter vivos* stays in his icons". In this manner a prayerful contact between Saints and believers takes place.

⁵ Images of cherubs were embroidered on a curtain of the Tabernacle. In Russian tradition of the divine service there is a curtain dated back to the 15th century bearing an image of the "guarding Archangel Michael, which was used in Alexandro-Svirskij monastery in the 17th–18th centuries as a door to the Credence. (See: ŠALINA 2000: 568).

⁶ According to I. A. Šalina the composition of the triple entrance to the altar goes back to the icon of Heavenly Jerusalem that was sent down by God to the earth and seen by St. John in Revelation: "And had a wall great and high ... [having] on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates" (Rev. 21, 12–13).

During a divine service “when a priest censers he embraces by this gesture the depicted Saints and the assembly of the praying in the temple expressing thus the unity of the Church, both heavenly and earthly (USPENSKIJ 1997: 106–7). Such unity of “living and existing” people and the departed is represented in the well-known Four-Part icon⁷ of the 16th century from the local row of the iconostasis of the Moscow Kremlin Cathedral of the Annunciation. Scholars at different times related its complicated graphic composition to the content of the texts of prayers and songs of the daily and yearly circles of divine worship (USPENSKIJ 1968; PODOBEDOVA 1972: 16–7, 40–58). In particular, one of the levels of “reading” of the Four-Part icon, according to N. Ju. Markina, is represented in its four compound parts corresponding to the four cardinal points (MARKINA 1994: 280). Such geographical orientation is echoed in the liturgical censuring of the credence from the four sides.

The Holy Fathers often emphasised the significance of censuring. Blessed Simeon of Thessalonica, when explaining censuring wrote that “incense purifies and sanctifies the air and, at the same time, our senses of smell and breath” and symbolises the Holy Spirit through Which blessing descends (see SIMEON SOLUNSKIJ 1987: 30). The Gospel According to St. Luke and the Hagiography narrate of a profound prayer of righteous Zechariah, when an angel appeared to him in the temple during censuring (see St. Luke 1). Peasants also knew of the cleansing properties of incense and therefore attached great importance to censuring due to its ability to expel evil spirits. Thus censuring in the whole realm where icons and people can be found signifies their consecration. A priest censures people because in a sense they are also icons, the image of God to which deference should be shown.

For an Orthodox Christian a candle lighted in front of an icon is a symbol of love for God, a sign of faith and hope for the Lord’s help always given to those who turn to Him with a prayer. That is why every believer first lights a candle or an icon-lamp before icons and then says a prayer.⁸ A tradition of lighting candles goes back to the time of the Prophetic service of Moses when, as the Old Testament narrates he was given an order to make a candlestick of pure gold with seven lamps (see Ex. 25, 31–40). Since then services with lamps have been performed in the Tabernacle (see Ex. 30, 8; 40, 4, 25). Burning lamps and candles have always served as symbols of the guidance of God. “For thou art my lamp”, *O Lord*, king David exclaims (2 Sam. 22, 29). “Thy word is a lamp for my foot”, he says in another book (Psalter 118, 105). Saint Apostles, first followers of Christ would also light lamps when coming together for a prayer and conversation: “And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together” (Acts 20, 8).

In the ancient Christian Church there was a rite to bring candles to the temple for Vespers when they sang “O, gladsome light” – a song telling of spiritual light enlightening every person, i.e., of Christ who enlightened the world by the light of His blessed

⁷ The history of this icon is connected with the period of restoration works in the Kremlin after the fire of 1547 as well as with the Church Council of 1553–1554 when the so-called “Djak Viskovatyj case” was examined – on the lawfulness of creating icons with complicated theological content, including the Four-Part icon.

⁸ Before the 18th century at the divine services especially in small villages and remote monasteries wooden vessels were used and splinters burnt instead of candles, like in the early ages of Christianity. (POLONSKAYA, N. D. *Istoriko-kulturnyj atlas po russkoj istorii*. Kiev, 1914. Vyp. 3. p. 50).

knowledge. During daily divine services in churches candles and icon-lamps are lighted as well. Blessed Jerome testifies to the spiritual importance of candles: "In all Eastern Churches when there is the time to read the Gospel, candles are lighted by the light of the sun as well – verily, not for the sake of expulsion of darkness but as the token of joy, in order to show the other Light under the cover of sensible light..." (BEXČANOV: 61). The 7th Ecumenical Council secured the ancient tradition by ordering that the holy icons and relics, the Holy Cross and the Gospel in the Church should be revered with censuring incense and lighting candles (KARTAŠEV 1999: 50).

A candle burning before an icon in a temple is also a custom of veneration of a sacred object. According to an ancient order, in a newly consecrated temple an archpriest lights and puts the first candle with his own hands behind the altar table (NIKANOR, arxiepiskop 15). In the churches of ancient Russia there was a custom to light big candles. An unknown Englishman, who visited Russia in the 16th century, went to the Trinity monastery (which one in particular is not indicated). He wrote that there he "was shown a church in which there were as many icons as it was possible to hang on the walls", many of the images being richly decorated. "In the middle of the church there thirteen wax candles stood two arshins lengthwise and around a sazhen thick; a cauldron with wax weighing about 100 [obviously poods] also stood there, in which a lamp was burning permanently, like an icon-lamp which could not be blown out notwithstanding whether it was day or night" (*Rossija, èto sama žizn'* 1999: 41).

Paul of Aleppo, who observed the religious life of the Russian people in the 17th century, noted that each person going to church carried one or several candles to light before icons. It was customary to incorporate money into candles, which afterwards went to the church. He also mentioned that at that time icon-lamps were rarely used because oil was very expensive and it froze in winter, that is why candles were often put in icon-lamps (ALEPPSKIJ 1897). Since Russia was long renowned as a country rich in wax, candles burned in churches at all times being in a sense a bloodless sacrifice to the Lord.

In the 19th century a correspondent S. Mironov while answering questions of the Ethnographical Bureau of prince Tenišev wrote that each householder bought candles and put them before his favourite icon. Candles for health would more often be put by men before an icon of the Saviour, and by women before an icon of the Holy Virgin. Many candles were put before a highly respected icon of Saint Nicolas the Miracle-Worker. "When one wishes to give hidden alms, he passes the money for a candle around from afar with the indication that a candle be put before a certain icon. This way the money comes to the candle box. A churchwarden after receiving the money puts the candle himself or passes it to the nearest believer". Some people, on the contrary, distrusting persons standing closer to icons, after purchasing a candle force their way through the crowd, make a sign of the cross before the image and put the candle themselves. Then they make a sign of the cross three times again and step aside, not going to the back but standing ahead of all (Rossijskij Etnografičeskij musej (REM) f. 7, inventory 1, file 1502, pp. 13–4; file 938, p. 9). In Čerepovetskij district of Novgorod province they would follow different rules: approaching the icon at a distance of two to three steps they bowed from the waist three times and after putting a candle moved back to the same distance with their

faces turned to the icon, not showing it their backs. Then they would bow deeply three times and return to their places with dignity. In the village of Šuklina Dmitrij Grigoriev was considered the most prayerful. He used to put a candle before one of the icons during every divine service. "It is a sin to pray at the expense of somebody else's candle when you keep the fast," he would say (REM f. 7, inventory 1, file 841, p. 17, 21).

In Nižnelomovski district of Penza province it was customary to touch a shoulder of a devotee standing before one when passing a candle through the rows of the praying, both persons bowing to each other (REM, f. 7, inventory 1, file 1369, p. 2–3).

In the old days many people before starting some important project gave a pledge to put a candle to an icon behind the altar, an icon before the Royal Doors or before an image of one of the Saints. Similarly it was customary to put candles on successful completion of the project. Today many non-observing people when entering an Orthodox temple and not knowing what to do, intuitively understand that by putting a candle before an icon they would make their first right step in the church – make their first minor sacrifice to the Lord. Thus during the whole history of the Orthodox Christian church in Russia believers turned to God in joy and sorrow, consecrating their prayer with the flame of a candle, hoping to receive blessings from the Saints for indeed "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Mt. 7, 2).

The decoration of icons can also be regarded as an outer form of veneration of icons. In ancient Russian sources – annals, legends of miracle-working icons, spiritual charters, church hymnography (akathists) and even epigraphy – there are many descriptions of the decorations of images. Not dwelling on the precious attire of icons, we will briefly mention pledge pendants which can also be considered as a form of decorations. They have been made according to a pledge, in gratitude for miraculous healing. Believers who had recovered from diseases of limbs and eyes, would bring images of the healed parts of the body as gifts and hang them on bands, strings and chains. V. V. Igošev mentions that some of these pendants bore inscriptions, such as: "about the health", "for health", "for suffering". They would often bear the names of the Saints to whom a prayer was offered, or the names of donors in need of healing were also chased and engraved on them (IGOŠEV 1997: 62).

Evidently the origin of the custom goes back to the miracle that happened to an ardent advocate of the veneration of icons, venerable John of Damascus (8th century). Being an adherent of the faith and piety, the right hand with which the Saint rendered his great service for the protection of the Orthodox Church was severed. He ordered that the severed hand be bound to his arm with an "ubrus" taken from the icon of Our Lady and the hand miraculously adhered to the stump. In memory of the miracle, Saint John of Damascus made a silver image of a hand and attached it to the holy icon, which has since then been called "the Three-Handed" (BUSLAEV 1861: 123). The first copies of the icon are known in Russia since the middle of the 17th century.

In Yaroslavl province as late as the 1890s there existed a custom of decorating the most revered icons in a church with such pendants. A recovered person ordered a miniature image of a healed hand, foot or heart made of silver or other metal and hung it with a silk band on the icon as a token of gratitude. This custom was quite popular in the province. The hanging of pendants was recorded in Danilovskij, Lubimskij districts, in

churches of Romanovo-Borisoglebsk, in temples of Uglič and in Pošexona Cathedral (REM f. 7, inventory 1, file 1759).

Before the October revolution in Pskov near the Saint Varlaam of Xutynsk Cathedral there was a chapel also called Varlaam Chapel. In it was an icon of Our Lady "Consolation of all the Afflicted" with a pendant in the form of two eyes attached to it. This gift was made by Pskov Archpastor Methodius II, to whom the icon had granted healing from an eye disease (*Xudotvornye ikony* Vol. 2, 1993: 693).

The custom of attaching pendants as a token of gratitude for the healing was preserved not only in the provinces. In the beginning of the 20th century numerous pendants attached to the famous Iberian Icon of Our Lady testified to the gratitude of Moscow believers healed by the sacred icon (*Ibid.* Vol. 1: 161). Many believers hang their crosses, chains, beads and rings on the icon. Many such pendants were (and are) attached to the icon of Our Lady "Seeking the Lost" in the Moscow church of the Resurrection in Zhdanov street. Sometimes pendants presented were used for the renovation of icon ornaments.

In the village of Suxaja Kaligorka of Zvenigorod district of Kiev province in a Parish Church of St. John the Theologian a miracle-working icon of Our Lady of Kaligorka was kept. The icon became famous in the 18th century. Among numerous pendants there one could see a silver bullet. In the church records it was said that during the war between Russia and Turkey in 1828 a colonel S. Z. was located with his regiment in this area and visited this church where he prayed before the miracle-working icon. Soon after he was wounded with a splinter of a bullet near the heart in such a way that according to doctors there was no hope for recovery. Meanwhile a batman, who was tending the wounded colonel, saw in his dream an old man (Saint Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian as followed from the description), who, under the threat of punishment for not obeying, ordered the batman to tell his master to turn to the Most Holy Virgin for help. The colonel started to pray ardently to Our Lady for healing, remembering the miracle-working icon of Kaligorka. Then for the first time after the prolonged insomnia he was suffering from due to severe pain, he fell asleep. In his dream he saw a Lady similar to the image from the Kaligorka icon, who with Her hand pulled out the splinter lodged near his heart and said: "Get up!" On awakening he actually saw the splinter lying on the bed. When he had fully recovered, he ordered a silver bullet to be made, put the splinter in it, and engraved on the bullet a heart with his initials S. Z. and the words: "what I was wounded by and near what – those I sacrifice" (*Ibid.* Vol. 2, 781).

There were other kinds of pendants as well. Before the revolution the Cathedral of the Dormition in Velikij Ustjug had an icon "Hodegetria" of Ustjug famous for its miracles. On 13 June 1813 a head of the local police, who had been suffering from a severe disease for many years, was bestowed full recovery after a prayer service before the icon. In gratitude for the mercy manifested he hung on the icon a silver plate with a description of the miracle (*Ibid.* 485).

Though the peasants had more modest material means, they venerated icons no less than the upper classes. Thus in Kargopolie, the memory of the Venerable Saint Macarius of Unža, Nižni Novgorod, was particularly respected. The spiritual centre of the district was St. Macarius's Monastery of Xergozero known since 1764. On St. Macarius's Com-



memoration Day (7 August) the people of all nearby and remote villages gathered there. As our contemporaries still remembering those festivals report, St. Macarius was respected in Lekšmozer'e as the quickest and the most reliable defender and saviour from all diseases and troubles. "(They) went on Macarius's Day (to the monastery) by villages, believing that once a pledge was given to the Saint a sick person would recover and a child would become stronger. There were different vows: in case of a headache they hung a kerchief on the icon of the Saint, in case of body diseases a length of material, in case of diseases of the lower limbs, stockings".

Praskovja Fedorovna Basova, a native of that area telling about the healing power of the Saint described the case of her acquaintance whom doctors were not able to help. "She gave a pledge. She was to go to St. Macarius, and she had two things to vow. She hung them on the icon and lighted three thin candles in three places – she knew where to put them – and she kneeled and prayed. I met her not long ago: she looked quite different, not ill, she had put on weight,⁹ she used to be very thin. She had become so pretty" (MELEXOVA–NOSOV 1994: 123–6).

Today when Russian Orthodox traditions are reviving one can see pendants brought by grateful believers by respected icons in many churches. They are generally crosses, beads and rings. A miracle-working icon of Our Lady of Kazan kept in the Cathedral of the Theophany in Moscow, a miracle-working icon "Joy Unhoped-for" kept in the Moscow Church named after that icon (in Mar'ina Rošča) and many other venerated images of Our Lady are decorated this way.

These forms of veneration of icons in a temple have hardly changed for a thousand years since the time of the baptism of Russia. Love for icons is a part of the religious conscience of believers. Russian Christians today bear out a living Russian Orthodox reality with their faith and spiritual integrity. The growing number of temples and icons in them represent a symbol of a spiritually unsubdued Russia.

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⁹ The tradition of expressing one's gratitude to an icon for healing still exists in the Orthodox world. Thus, in the town of Katomony not far from Jerusalem there is a temple above the tomb of St. Simeon. The shrine is decorated with lamps and above the icon of the saint there hang tokens of gratitude: miniature metal hands, feet, and gold coins. (Inokinja NATALIA. *Russkij Jerusalim*. St. Petersburg, 1996. p. 85).

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Fig. 1. Pešanskaja icon of Our Lady with votive gifts (gold rings, chains, etc.). Village Izjum, province of Harkov, Ukrajna, 2003. All photos were made by Tatjana Voronina

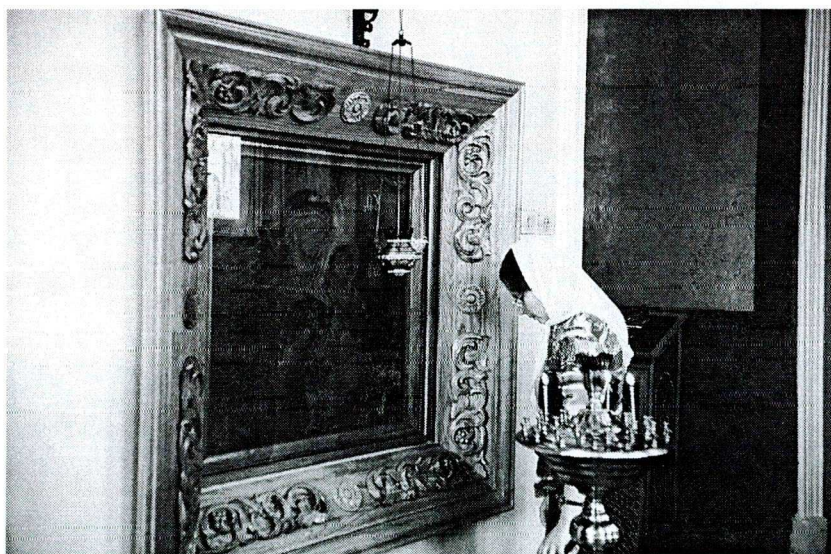


Fig. 2. Near the wonder-working Smolensk-Kostroma icon (fresco). Kostroma, the Church by the name of Smolensk icon of Our Lady, 2003



Fig. 3. Kissing the icon of Saint Trinity on feast of Holy Trinity. The cathedral of Assumption of Our Lady. Rjazan, 2002

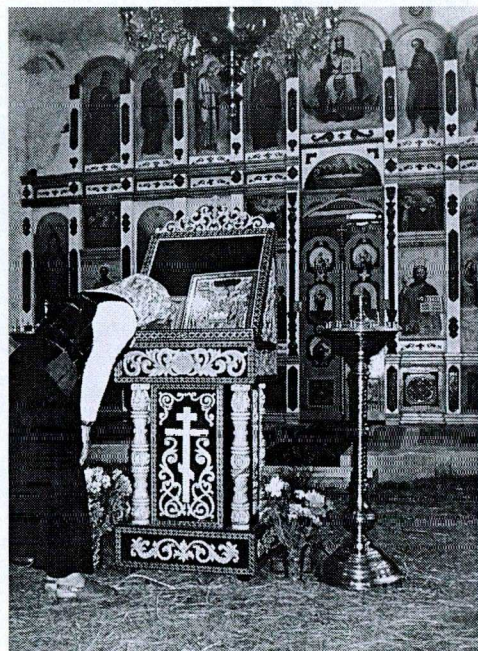


Fig. 4. Kissing the icon of Saint Trinity on feast of Holy Trinity. The cathedral of Assumption of Our Lady. Rjazan, 2002

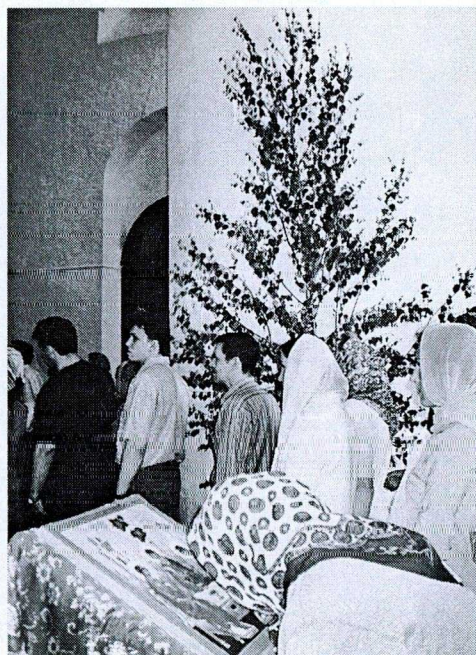


Fig. 5. Kissing the icon of Saint Trinity on feast of Holy Trinity. The cathedral of Assumption of Our Lady. Rjazan, 2002